

times interactive with malnutrition, sleeping disorders, hormonal functioning, and a variety of other health conditions.

From the chapter on older women we learned that in our society women are expected to care for other family members and that this can cause stress and resulting negative health consequences. We also learned that chronic diseases like arthritis and osteoporosis impact on ADM issues.

Finally, the impact of a woman's minority status on her health was discussed at length, and we were appropriately reminded of the numbers of minority women who are in need of preventive and ameliorative health care.

### **Consumer Role**

These highlights from the ADM chapter and the discussion of how these illnesses interact with the life span, social factors, and other health conditions may prompt the question: What can we do about these ADM illnesses to which women are subject? The most important first step is to be an informed con-

sumer. Informed consumers do not use illegal drugs or tobacco. Informed consumers avoid abusing or misusing prescription drugs and alcohol. Informed consumers also are aware of early warning signs of illness in themselves, their friends, colleagues, and employees and seek help quickly. Informed consumers also insist that the health care system they use is competent to diagnose, treat, or refer patients with ADM problems. Informed consumers also work within their community to support those factors associated with all aspects of good health.

Finally, a consumer can insist on honesty in advertising, an issue related to many aspects of women's health discussed at this conference and additional issues discussed in the full Task Force Report.

### **Reference .....**

1. Women's health. Report of the Public Health Service Task Force on Women's Health Issues. Vol. 2. DHHS Publication No. (PHS) 85-50206, Public Health Service, Washington, DC, May 1985.

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## **Women's Health: A Course of Action**

### **Making a Difference Through Prevention**

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**I**T IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER that the simple things count. Our ability to make a difference in preventing some of the problems in women's health is greater than most persons think. Prevention is something we can handle as individuals. We need not be overwhelmed by scientific methods and complex technology. The automobile industry put a lot of money into the research that made seatbelts workable and now we need to do nothing more complicated than buckle up.

Keep the simple things in mind. That is one message. That is something that women have the ability to do right now, today, for themselves, for their families, and for the people about whom they care.

Second message: Professionals are probably members of organizations. They work with other people, and they may have a leadership role. They may carry a message of their own, both in the things that they do as individuals and in their professional roles. Because of this, they have enormous opportunities. One is to use a very traditional mechanism—talking to colleagues. How does something become an agenda item? How is it made important? Each individual has great influence. Mix influence with energy to accomplish much to achieve goals.

There is another opportunity: working through nontraditional networks to accomplish goals. One of the things to learn about particular populations such as minorities or women or anyone in our society is to take advantage of everyday activities. For example, going to the store and shopping, getting a haircut, going to work, or seeing a physician or dentist.

These activities are very basic and we take them for granted. We do not usually think of them in a professional sense as settings for health education. Yet, for example, a major Washington food chain

and several other large organizations have taken it upon themselves to try to help educate consumers. Often they do this in concert with professional organizations, sometimes with the government, sometimes with other organizations like themselves. What they promote is often for the health of the individual person, and as a result there is an opportunity to contribute to such efforts by virtue of one's professional expertise.

There are public service advertisements in stores. Thus, there are ways to get important information to people in the community. Here is another way that professional expertise can count, and one can make a valuable contribution to the community.

Recently, a researcher and clinician at the University of Maryland at Baltimore has set up a program that involves taking blood pressures in barber shops. Barber shops are a fairly nontraditional site for health interventions in this century. But here people congregate in this setting. People are concerned about their health in general, and there is an opportunity, as a professional, to get into that kind of environment and make a difference by taking a blood pressure. Yes, it takes a lot of work to make a difference. That does not mean the effort should not be made.

Third message: Most Americans want to maintain good health. So, as individuals, there is an opportunity to make a difference not only in one's own life, but in the lives of the people that we care about and care for.

As we get older we need to be more concerned about certain things that affect health—osteoporosis, Alzheimer's disease, and a variety of other issues will affect women and their families.

You have to put all the elements together to succeed in any effort. You have to structure your priorities so that you know what you are after. The agenda in women's health is very broad.

Social factors are interwoven throughout everything that happens to people. They affect women differentially because of their economic status, their health, and the kinds of things that women do to maintain their lives.

Physical health and well-being are affected by a variety of factors. Minority populations have particular concerns, as do older women. The issues in drug abuse, alcohol, and mental health must also be of concern. Each of these areas has many component parts, and there must be some priority about what you are going to try to accomplish, otherwise you will find it difficult to meet your objectives. What is it that you want to do? You will have to focus on the issues and answer that question.

*'Prevention is something we can handle as individuals. We need not be overwhelmed by scientific methods and complex technology. The automobile industry put a lot of money into the research that made seat belts workable and now we need to do nothing more complicated than buckle up.'*

Being an "enlightened individual" is an exceptional thing. It is very difficult to be enlightened. We often have one idea, and we are not willing to look at the other factors that might alter our perspective. But women's health does not occur simply within the structure of one view. It is one's life. It is all lives, not women alone, but men, children, and the world in which we live. That is important to remember because everything that we do affects something else. Nothing happens in a vacuum. If we do not keep that in mind, then our successes will be very small compared with what we can do together.